BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 08632 619 4

№ 7551-316

GIVEN BY

Miss Elizabeth Belknap.

7551.316

MR. HAVEN's

SERMON

PREACHED FEBRUARY 7th, 1796.

FORTY YEARS AFTER HIS SETTLEMENT

IN THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY

IN

DEDHAM.

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE FIRST SOCIETY IN

DEDHAM,

ON THE 7th DAY OF FEBRUARY, 1796.

FORTY YEARS AFTER THE AUTHOR'S INDUCTION

INTO THE WORK OF THE

GOSPEL MINISTRY.

7551.316

By JASON HAVEN, A.M.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN SAID TOWN.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY THOMAS FLEET, JUN. AT THE BIBLE & HEART.

MDCCXCVI.

he would not desert it, because the duties of it could not be performed, but with great danger and self-denial. In this he set a noble example, to the followers of CHRIST, in general, and to his ministers in particular. "Having put their hand to the plough they should not look back." They should not neglect any known duty, whatever may be the expence or pain of performing it.

IN the following words of our text he rises, in the expression of a holy zeal and heroick courage. "Neither count I my life dear to me, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the LORD JESUS." He had "received the ministry" of the gospel, or an apostleship, "of the LORD JESUS," who is the great LORD of the harvest, whose sovereign province it is to send labourers into his vineyard. This apostle had a clear, a special, an extraordinary call to this work. The call he had accepted; and to the service he had devoted his life. Therefore to *wear it out*, or even to *lay it down*, in that sacred employment, was not so painful to his mind and apprehension, as the thought of quitting the work or doing the duties of it slightly. He had set out in the christian *course*; he had engaged in the christian *ministry*. To finish these well was his great object. This so strongly engaged his attention and pursuit, as to give him a noble elevation of soul, above the obstructions and discouragements which might lie in the way. He expected his life would be spent, and perhaps shortned by a diligent and faithful performance of his duty as a christian, and especially as a christian minister. He laid his account in this, and the event proved his calculation just.

PAUL went to Jerusalem. After he had preached the gospel there, for a season, and with some success, the Jews, in a tumultuous manner seized him, and brought him before their ecclesiastical court. They accused him of subverting their system of religion, and of teaching things contrary to the law of Moses. He made a clear, rational, and animated defence. But finding it did not

satisfy

ſatisfy the partial bigotted judges, before whom he was brought, he appealed to Cæſar, the roman emperor. After a while, he was ſent to Rome, to take his trial there. His trial was long delayed. During the delay, he enjoyed ſome liberty. He improved it, in promoting a cauſe, which lay near to his heart, and was dearer to him than his life. He preached the goſpel, planted chriſtian churches, and wrote epiſtles. After a while he was confined a priſoner at Rome. In priſon he wrote ſeveral of thoſe invaluable epiſtles, which we have in the new-teſtament, and which conſtitute part of the ſacred canon. After he was liberated from this confinement, which continued about two years, he travelled over great part of Italy, preaching the goſpel, and founding churches. He went to Spain, to Crete, to Philippi, to Macedonia; and at length, returned to Rome, about the year of the chriſtian æra 65. The ſacred hiſtory doth not particularly inform us, what brought on his ſecond impriſonment, at Rome, and his death. But ſome of the antient fathers, and particularly St. Chryſoſtom, tell us, in their writings, that he having converted, by his miniſtry, a cupbearer, and a concubine, of the emperor Nero, who was a bitter enemy, and cruel perſecutor, of chriſtianity, he was ſo enraged, that he ordered Paul to be ſeized, and committed to priſon: That from priſon he was brought forth, and beheaded, at a place called the *ſalvian waters*, on the 29th day of June, A. D. 66: That he was buried at *Oſtium*; and that afterwards, when the roman empire became chriſtian, a magnificent church was built over his tomb, which, Mr. Calmet, in his dictionary, ſays continues to this day. Thus this great apoſtle to the Gentiles, "finiſhed his courſe, and the miniſtry which he had received of the LORD JESUS," by the honors of martyrdom. No man, it is likely, ever did as much in ſpreading the goſpel, and promoting the cauſe of CHRIST, as he. That his ſufferings, in his cauſe were exceedingly great and preſſing, we may collect, from the hiſtory of the acts of the apoſtles, and from ſeveral of his own letters, before he ſealed his teſtimony to the truth and goodneſs of that cauſe, by his blood.

But is this a juſt picture of what the miniſters of Christ's religion are to expect, and of what they do in general ſuffer? In anſwer to this enquiry, it may be ſaid, that there hath been no ſmall ſimilarity between the ſervices and ſufferings of this eminent ſervant of Christ, and thoſe of many, who were his brethren and companions, "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus;" eſpecially in the early days of chriſtianity, when its promoters generally met with warm oppoſition, and cruel perſecution. The caſe has been very different, at ſome periods, and in ſome countries ſince. This difference hath been ſtrikingly obvious, in our happy land, in which the principles of religious liberty have been ſo well underſtood, and maintained; and in which, the faithful miniſters of the goſpel, inſtead of being perſecuted, have been honoured, and encouraged, by men of the beſt and moſt reſpectable characters in civil ſtations.

But can we hence pronounce, that labourers, in this part of Christ's vineyard, have no trials and difficulties, connected with their profeſſion and employment? This would, undoubtedly, be carrying the matter too far, and ſaying what is univerſally found by experience not to be true.

Indeed for one, in that profeſſion, to exhibit a long and dark catalogue of the trials and troubles which attend it, might lead ſome to ſuſpect, that he aimed to make a merit to himſelf, in the fortitude and patience with which he meets, and bears ſuch trials and troubles. I wiſh not to fall under ſuch an imputation, or ſuſpicion. Still I do not conceive it amiſs for one, in the profeſſion, before mentioned, to ſuggeſt ſome of the burthens and difficulties which can hardly be ſeparated from it. This may tend to excite a proper degree of candor and tenderneſs, in his fellow chriſtians towards him, and to engage their prayers for him. "He who wears the ſhoe, beſt knows where it is ſtrait and pinches," to uſe a common remark; or to uſe one of Solomon's, "the heart knoweth his own bitterneſs."

No

No ſmall part of the difficulty of a goſpel miniſter's work and office, conſiſts in properly "taking heed to himſelf." To maintain that ſpirituality, that devout and pious frame of mind, and that ſober circumſpect courſe of conduct, which the chriſtian character requires, and which is peculiarly requiſite, to ſupport and adorn the miniſterial, is no eaſy thing, even for a good man. Great watchfulneſs, fervent prayer, and help from above, are neceſſary to it. The miniſters of religion are compared to "a city ſet on a hill which cannot be hid." Many eyes are upon them. Theſe are not always the eyes of candor and friendſhip, but too often of ſuſpicion and malevolence. What miniſter can be always ſo circumſpect and cautious, as to avoid creating, though without intending it, a number of little piques and enemies, againſt himſelf? He may do it ſometimes, even by an inflexible diſcharge of neceſſary duties. And if his character muſt be taken from thoſe whom he has thus innocently, perhaps laudably, offended, all his virtues will be thrown into the back ground, and his foibles magnified with the utmoſt virulence of malice, and reſentment.

No part of his profeſſional buſineſs, which a chriſtian miniſter has to perform, is without it's attendant trials and difficulties. He muſt, through a great proportion of his time, apply himſelf to cloſe ſtudy. "This is eaſy employment," ſome may be ready to pronounce; and thoſe would be moſt likely to pronounce ſuch an opinion, with confidence, who know leaſt of the matter. An ancient Sage, who knew what it is to apply his mind to a great variety of ſubjects, to acquire ſcience, and inveſtigate truth, remarks, "that much ſtudy is a wearineſs to the fleſh." Cloſe exertion of the mind preys rapidly on the body. It relaxes and weakens the various ſprings of the animal machine. It impairs the powers of digeſtion; hence crudities abound, producing that very afflictive and variegated tribe of diſorders, called *nervous*, and *hypocondriac*, by which no claſs of men ſuffer ſo much, as the ſedentary and ſtudious. They often

often become ſtrangers to quiet repoſe, and refreſhing ſleep. All the ſprings of life are weakened, and the period of it frequently accelerated. Great ſtudents ſeldom enjoy a healthful vigorous ſtate of body, for any conſiderable ſpace of time. Their lot is often an early old age, and premature death.

Will it not require the vigorous employment of all the powers of the chriſtian paſtor's mind, to ſearch out the various truths and duties, contained in the ſacred oracles? To ſhew their harmony and connection? In weekly compoſitions, to aſſort and arrange them, in plain and familiar language; and in a manner adapted to the different ages, characters and circumſtances of his people? To endeavour, by a proper application of them, to awaken the thoughtleſs and ſecure; to lead the weary and heavy laden to reſt and ſafety in Christ; to remove from hypocrites their falſe hopes and confidences, that they may build on the ſure corner ſtone, laid in Zion; to comfort the meek and humble followers of Jeſus, when their ſpirits are depreſſed, with gloomy apprehenſions of their ſtate and character; and to guide all into that way of ſalvation, revealed in the goſpel? The perſon who ſuppoſes ſuch ſervices can be performed, and ſuch ſtated inſtructions prepared, without much cloſe ſtudy, and great application of mind, judges quite erroneouſly. He muſt have paid very little attention to the matter.

As to the labor of *public ſpeaking*, from ſabbath to ſabbath, and on other days of ſocial worſhip, ſome may ſuppoſe it light and inconſiderable. Do ſuch judge rightly? Do they judge by experience? The experiment will ſhew ſuch an opinion to be unfounded, and muſt have taught all who have made it, that to ſtand for ſeveral hours, and to ſpeak, with a voice loud and forcible enough to be heard, by a large aſſembly, require no ſmall exertions of ſtrength; and that few things will ſooner ſpend and exhauſt it. Not only the lungs, and other organs of ſpeech, are kept on the ſtrain; but the

powers

powers of the mind muſt, at the ſame time, be vigorouſly exerciſed. There muſt be a conſtant concern to ſpeak clearly and properly. In moſt aſſemblies the preacher has the additional trial, of ſeeing ſome before him, whoſe attention he is not able to gain, by his beſt endeavours, to prepare uſeful inſtructions, and to deliver them with propriety; ſome who, either fall aſleep, or appear quite heedleſs and inattentive, "hearing as though they heard not;" others who, if they hear, it is not with the beſt diſpoſition; it is rather with a view, to watch for faults, and to make uncandid remarks, than to be inſtructed, and excited to a faithful performance of duty. A mere miſtake, in the ſpeaker, will, by ſuch perſons, be magnified into a crime; and any little impropriety, or uncouthneſs, in his accents, pronunciation, or geſture, will be more noticed, than the moſt uſeful and important ſentiments; will be remembred longer, and be mentioned oftner, either to cenſure, or ridicule the performer. The preſent ſpeaker, however liable he may be to ſuch remarks, has the ſatisfaction to think, there are as few, among his ſtated hearers, diſpoſed to make them, as in moſt aſſemblies.

But there is another thing, which may be ſtill more likely to excite unfriendly feelings, in many perſons towards their miniſter, and conſequently be an exerciſe to his faith and patience. His office obliges him to be plain and faithful in his public addreſſes, to reprove the vicious, to warn them of their danger, to call them to repentance, to urge on them the performance of neglected duties, and to preſs ſuch a virtuous and godly converſation, as is contrary to a carnal heart, and a corrupt diſpoſition. Such exhortations and admonitions will generally be ungrateful to the more looſe and vicious part of an audience. Will they not be apt to feel, towards their religious inſtructor, much as Ahab did towards the prophet Micajah, though they ſhould not expreſs their feelings, in ſo plain terms? "I hate him, for he always propheſieth evil concerning me."

Still

STILL more difficult it may be, for a chriſtian miniſter to give private counſel, exhortation and reproof, without awakening the reſentment of thoſe whom he addreſſes, and bringing on himſelf the pointed marks of their diſpleaſure. Yet faithfulneſs to GOD, and to them, will not ſuffer him to neglect this difficult and painful duty.

THE ſervice, to which a miniſter is often called, of viſiting and converſing with the ſick, frequently involves in it great difficulties, trials, and temptations. He many times finds perſons, in ſore diſtreſs, both of body and mind. Their ſituation ſtrongly excites compaſſion. His heart muſt be hard and unfeeling indeed, not to be tenderly moved. As to many of theſe perſons, he may have no ground, from their former lives and converſation, to judge favourably of their ſpiritual ſtate. He wiſhes to ſpeak words of comfort to them, and to apply the promiſes of the goſpel, to diſpel their fears, and eaſe their pained minds. His bowels of pity and tenderneſs almoſt conſtrain him to do it. But he is anxious, leſt this ſhould produce a falſe peace, and lead them to reſt on deceptive hopes; leſt it ſhould prevent that ſenſe of guilt and danger, which they ought to entertain, in order to lay them low, humble, and penitent, at the feet of divine mercy, and to excite them to employ their remaining moments, and their laſt breath, in ardent cries to a compaſſionate GOD and SAVIOUR, for pardoning mercy, and ſanctifying grace. What can the miniſter do? If he deals plainly and faithfully, though from the moſt benevolent motives, he may be deemed cruel: He may grieve and offend the ſick peſons, and their ſurrounding friends. Thoſe who have never been called to perform the part of a goſpel miniſter's duty, which we are conſidering, will hardly conceive the difficulties which in many caſes attend it. Great wiſdom is requiſite ſo to unite fidelity and tenderneſs; that a dangerous preſumption may not be encouraged, nor a fatal deſpondency produced, in the laſt and important days, and hours of ſickneſs, and of life.

ANOTHER

ANOTHER thing, in the ſituation of a miniſter of religion, will, by perſons acquainted with human nature, be conſidered as painful and ſelfdenying, viz. his being obliged to give up his independence, ſo far as many of his people ſeem to expect; ſo far as to make himſelf ſubſervient to their call, their will, and, too often, to their humour; ſo far as to have ſcarcely any time which he can call his own; ſo far as not to be allowed to claim many of the common rights of human nature, with that free and independent ſpirit, with which other good men among his people do it, without giving any offence. He ought undoubtedly to adopt the language, and ſentiment of the great apoſtle, who owned himſelf "his people's ſervant for JESUS' ſake;" and to be willing in a ſober and conſiſtent ſenſe, "to become all things to all men;" i. e. to diſcover a kind, yielding, and condeſcending diſpoſition. But is it certain that this would give univerſal ſatisfaction? There may be, in moſt ſocieties, a number who expect their miniſter ſhould make a greater ſacrifice than this to pleaſe them. He muſt forbear to declare his opinion, with that decent freedom which others uſe, upon religious, domeſtic, or political ſubjects, concerning which a diverſity of ſentiments prevails among his people. Many individuals may be ready to claim a right of prohibiting their miniſter from expreſſing an opinion contrary to their's. If he doth not yield to that prohibition, he will hardly fail of meeting with the diſpleaſure of the perſons, from whom he dares to diſſent. Miniſters, as well now, as in the day of our SAVIOUR's abode upon earth, need to be "wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves." And when they ſincerely deſire and endeavour to be ſo, it is hardly to be expected they ſhould be ſo fortunate as to give offence to none. Their conceſſions may not come up to the wiſhes of ſome. Is it poſſible to pleaſe all, when ſo many, and ſo different tempers and diſpoſitions, views and deſigns exiſt among their pariſhioners?

ONE

One of the moſt painful trials, which Chriſt's miniſters often meet with, ſtill remains to be mentioned, namely, the little attention paid to their moſt faithful inſtructions, by a great proportion of their people, and the ſmall ſucceſs of their labours, in general. It is hard to ſay what can be more grievous and diſheartening to thoſe who have a proper concern for the proſperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the ſalvation of precious ſouls. Under this diſcouragement, reſpecting the people to whom he miniſtred, the prophet Jeremiah once made this reſolution, "I will ſpeak no more to them, in the name of the Lord." This drew very moving complaints from ſome others of God's antient prophets. "I have laboured in vain, and ſpent my ſtrength for nought: Iſrael will not be gathered. Who hath believed our report?"

When a miniſter is diligent in his ſtudies, fervent in his prayers, earneſt in his preaching, faithful in giving private counſel, and circumſpect in his own conduct, yet then to obſerve many among his people growing evidently more hardened and fixed in wickedneſs; many who will not give themſelves the trouble of attending publick worſhip; many more, who appear quite careleſs and unconcerned about the welfare of their immortal ſouls; and ſome among thoſe who have bound themſelves, by publick covenant engagements, to maintain a life of ſtrict piety and virtue, yet walking very unſuitably to the profeſſion they have made; what can more deeply and painfully wound him? Yet thus wounded, many times, are Christ's faithful miniſters. Their time, their ſtrength, and their lives are wearing away, without the comfort of ſatisfactory evidences that "their labour is not in vain, in the Lord."

I have been long, perhaps too long, in ſketching out the dark ſide of the picture of a chriſtian miniſter's ſituation. Still nothing has been ſaid but what I believe to be a juſt repreſentation, and what is often realized, by perſons in the ſacred office. This may have led many miniſters,

miniſters, of the preſent day, to apply to themſelves, the remark which the apoſtle made, relative to himſelf, and his brethren in the apoſtolic office. " If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men moſt miſerable."

But is there no bright ſide to this picture? Is there no counterpart to what hath been deſcribed, of a miniſter's labours, trials and conflicts? Hath he no pleaſures and comforts, while diſcharging the duties of his ſtation? He undoubtedly has, if he is faithful, and ſome which are exceedingly endearing and ſupporting. The approbation of his own conſcience, and comfortable hopes of the Divine approbation. Senſible aid and aſſiſtance in his labours, from the ſpirit and grace of Christ. Delightful contemplations on the truths, and bleſſings of the goſpel, for which his profeſſional buſineſs gives him great advantages. The friendſhip, the warm affection, the ſincere good wiſhes, and the fervent prayers, of the moſt amiable and worthy characters, among his people. Great ſatisfaction, ſometimes, in ſeeing " the pleaſure of the Lord proſpering in his hands;" and " ſouls flocking to Christ, as doves to their windows:" And eſpecially the proſpect of thoſe gracious rewards, which Christ hath promiſed to his faithful miniſters, when they ſhall have finiſhed their courſe, and the miniſtry they have received. " Be ye faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

Will not the faithful labourer, in the vineyard of Christ, who keeps the eye of his faith fixed on ſuch gracious promiſes, be comforted, in all his tribulations? Will he not, like the apoſtle, though ſorrowful, yet be always rejoicing? Yea it may be hoped that in the near views of death, he may be able in a good meaſure humbly to adopt his joyful and triumphant language. " I " am now ready to be offered, and the time of my de- " parture is at hand. I have fought a good fight: I " have finiſhed my courſe; I have kept the faith; " henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righ- " teouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, ſhall " give me, at that day."

WHO could be expected to enter into the ſacred employment, or long to continue in it, if nothing of this ſort was to be expected, or found, to ballance the many trials and difficulties which are inſeparable from it? More virtue and fortitude, than moſt men are poſſeſſed of, would be requiſite to prevent their ſhrinking from a ſervice, ſo unpromiſing, yea ſo formidable. But our SAVIOUR doth not leave, thus comfortleſs, his ſervants, whom He calls into his vineyard. Though the rewards of their diligence and fidelity are principally reſerved to the future world, yet for their preſent ſupport and comfort, He hath made ſuch gracious declarations as the following "Lo I am with you always to the end of the world. My grace is ſufficient for you, and my ſtrength is made perfect in your weakneſs."

WITH an expectation of both theſe, the trials * and the ſupports, your miniſter conſented to enter into the ſacred work, in this place, and was ſolemnly ſet apart to it forty years ago, viz. on the fifth day of February, A.D. 1756. A day, and a tranſaction much to be remembred; and which he can truly ſay have hardly been out of his ſerious recollection, for a week or a day ſince.†

SOON

* Seven members of the church, and three or four others, oppoſed his ſettlement. After a little time, he had the ſatisfaction of numbering them all, among his kind, affectionate, and confidential friends; and ſuch they all continued, to the cloſe of their lives.

† Very frequently hath he recollected the leading ſentiments of an excellent diſcourſe delivered by the rev. Mr. Appleton, on thoſe words of the apoſtle, 2 Tim. ii. 15. *Study to ſhew thyſelf approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be aſhamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* Often hath he recollected the charge by the rev. Mr. Townſend of Needham, delivered, at once, with that parental tenderneſs, and that ſeriouſneſs and gravity, which were happily united in the temper and conduct of that worthy ſervant of Chriſt. Often hath he recollected that profuſion of chriſtian friendſhip, and brotherly love, expreſſed, in the right hand of fellowſhip, given by the rev. Mr. Balch; all which friendſhip and brotherly love he continued to exemplify, while his valuable life was ſpared, towards the perſon then ordained, and towards his brethren, in the goſpel miniſtry in general.

Soon after his entering on the work he was visited with such bodily infirmities, as led him to expect his life and labours would be short; that he should, in a little time, finish his course, and the ministry which he had received. Still, with truth he can say, he did not forget his vows and resolutions, to work while it was day; nor did he feel an unwillingness to spend what little strength he had, in the service of his beloved people. He did "not account his life dear to him," if he might spend it successfully in the great work, on which he had entered. To the honour of God, he desires thankfully to mention it, that he was strengthened to go on, in his professional labours, much beyond his expectations, and with no long interruptions, for a number of years. With sentiments of gratitude and affection, he often reflects on the kind, candid, and tender manner, in which his people treated him, and with which his feeble endeavours to serve them were received. They did not despise either his youth or his infirmities. The abundant marks of their sympathetick tenderness and affection rendered all his labours among them, eminently labours of love, which were their own reward.

After about eighteen years, feebly, yet pleasantly spent, in their service, God was pleased to visit him with a threatning fever, which reduced him, in appearence, to the very gates of the grave. The tenderness with which they ministred to him during that sickness, is fresh in his grateful remembrance. Their prayers,* which God was pleased graciously to answer, called him back to further labours among them. The blessing of Heaven, on the gratuitous, the careful, and judicious prescriptions, and attendance of his skilful and benevolent physician,† recovered him to a better state of health, than he had enjoyed for some time before. With renewed pleasure and resolution he again entered on his publick and private labours, in the gospel. And with renewed marks of respect his people received him.

During

* A day of fasting and prayer was observed by his people, on his account.

† Doctor John Sprague.

DURING about seventeen years after this, he was not absent from public worship more than two sabbaths, excepting the time when he had the small pox, which detained him three. Frequently, however, in that term of seventeen years, has he come into this house of worship, weak and trembling, when it appeared to him hardly possible that, without special help from above, he should go through the services of the day. Strength was, as he desires thankfully to record, from time to time, vouchsafed to him.

ABOUT five years ago, he was visited with a slow fever, which detained him from the house of GOD, for five sabbaths. Since that time, he hath, every Lord's day attended the services of the sanctuary. He desires now to set up his EBENEZER, acknowledging that "hitherto the LORD hath helped him." He hath spared, and assisted him, to labour in his vineyard, feeble and imperfect as his labours have been, much longer than any of his predecessors, in this society. His term of service hath been protracted beyond that of most of his brethren, in the ministry.

UPON retrospecting this term of forty years, your minister finds much to lament, much to be humbled for, of his faults, defects, and imperfections. His hope is in the abundant mercy of GOD, and the merit of that blood, which was shed for the priesthood as well as for the congregation; to pardon what has been amiss; and to accept his feeble, though, he hopes, sincere attempts to promote the cause of Christ, and the good of souls. He finds, at the same time, many things which demand his gratitude to his DIVINE MASTER; particularly, that he hath called him to labour in so pleasant a part of his vineyard; that he hath supported and assisted him so long; that he hath rendered his services, in a good degree acceptable to his people; and that they have not, as he would humbly hope, been wholly useless and unsuccessful; though it is a painful consideration, that the evidences of their success have been so few. It is matter

of

of pleaſing and grateful reflection, that friendſhip and harmony among the people of his charge, and between him and them, have ſo generally prevailed. He fervently prays, that "brotherly love may continue." He rejoices with his flock that they have been, and now are, ſo free from thoſe religious diſputes, and contentions, which prevail in ſome ſocieties; occaſioned by different and militating ſentiments, and by the prevalence of various ſects and denominations of chriſtians.*

MANY events, in this ſociety have taken place within the term of forty years paſt. The inhabitants of the precinct, and the members of the church, are, in a great meaſure, changed. But 5 males, and 10 females, who were, ſo long ago, members of the church, continue alive among us. The church then conſiſted of 55 male members, and 87 females, reſident in the pariſh. It now conſiſts of 42 males, and 99 females. The whole number is 1 leſs now than it was then. The diſproportion between males and females is increaſed. The number of the former is 13 leſs, and of the latter, 12 more.

THE number of perſons admitted, who were not in communion with any church before, is 296, 7 have been received by recommendation from other churches. 32 have been diſmiſſed from this to other churches. The number of children which have been baptized, with us, in the above mentioned period, is 904. 10 adult perſons have been admitted to the ordinance of baptiſm.

THE number of couples, who have been joined in marriage, by your paſtor, one or both of which belonged to this town, is 279. A few have been married by magiſtrates, in the town.

THE

* There is not, in the firſt precinct in Dedham a family of profeſſed Baptiſts, Quakers, Methodiſts, or Univerſaliſts, known to the writer of this diſcourſe.

There are now, and have been for more than half a century paſt, a few families of the epiſcopal denomination. The rev. William Montague is their miniſter or rector.

The number of deaths in this ſociety, within the term of 40 years paſt, according to the moſt authentick records, is 529. I have formerly mentioned, that the yearly average number of deaths was between 9 and 10. It was ſo during the firſt 19 years of my miniſtry. In the laſt 21 years, in which the ſmall pox hath ſeveral times prevailed among us; the dyſentery, and ſome other epidemick diſtempers, the average number has been conſiderably greater.

Of the 529 perſons who have died, 9 have arrived to the age of 90 years, or upwards, which is nearly in the proportion of 1 to 60. 42 have lived to be 80 years old and upwards, beſides the 9 who ſurvived 90 years. This ſhews about 1 in 12 to arrive to the age of 80 years.

74 perſons have died between 70 and 80 years of age, which, in connection with the calculations above, ſhews that as great a proportion as 1 in 5, of thoſe who have died, in the term aforeſaid, have lived to ſee threeſcore years and ten, or more. I cannot aſcertain the number of births in this ſociety, during the term of 40 years paſt. It may be about 1100.

The above calculations ſhew, that a greater proportion of perſons, among us, than has been generally ſuppoſed, has lived to what we may call old age. If a regular, ſober, and virtuous mode of living may be aſſigned, as the natural cauſe, it reflects honour on the ſociety. A preſumptive argument is hereby ſuggeſted, in favour of the ſituation, air and climate, as being friendly to health, and long life. We are bound however ultimately to aſcribe it, to his kind providence, who is the "God of our life and the length of our days."

The number of females, who have lived to old age, is a little larger than that of males. There is not one man, now in the ſociety, quite 80 years old. There is one woman, in her 94th year; and ſeveral between 80 and 90 years old. There are 11 women, and 7 men, whoſe age is between 70 and 80 years, there are 7 men and 34 women in a ſtate of widowhood.

The

THE deaths, in the ſociety, have moſtly taken place by the common laws of mortality, or have been what we call *natural deaths*. None in the way of murther, or by the magiſtrate, "holding the ſword, as a terror to evil doers." The lives of ſeveral have been brought to an end, in the way of drowning, and by ſome other melancholly accidents. Two only have been loſt at ſea.* A ſmall number have died in the army either by ſword or ſickneſs.

THE three worthy perſons † who ſuſtained the office of deacons, when your preſent paſtor entered on his labours among you, all lived to a good old age; but have, for many years, been numbered among the dead. Two others,‡ choſen into that office, within 40 years paſt, after faithfully diſcharging the duties of it, for a length of time, are now by bodily infirmities, rendered unable to attend to them. We pray GOD to brighten the evening of their day, by the conſolations of that religion which they have long profeſſed, and endeavoured to promote. Our brethren, ‖ who now perform the benevolent ſervices of that office, we wiſh may long continue to perform them, to their own reputation, and to the ſatisfaction of the church.

VERY precious to you, no doubt, is the memory of many in the catalogue of more than five hundrtd perſons, deceaſed from among you, within 40 years paſt. Their memory is dear to your paſtor. In the number were included all the men, except 5 or 6, who invited him into the office, which he now ſuſtains among

* William Ames, and William Avery, jun.

† Deacons Joſeph Wight, Ephraim Willſon, and Nathaniel Kingſbury. The firſt of theſe died July 14th 1756, in the 75th year of his age. and 27th of his office. The ſecond died July 19th 1769, in the 86th year of his age, and 34th of his office. The third died Auguſt 20th 1775, in the 78th year of his age, and 29th of his deaconſhip.

‡ Deacon William Avery, now in the 80th year of his age, and 37th of his office. Deacon Ebenezer Richards, in the 78th year of his age, and 27th of his office.

‖ Deacons Joſeph Whiting, Aaron Fuller, and Iſaac Bullard.

among you. Not a few of them were his intimate and confidential friends, whom he often met, with great delight, in the houſe of GOD, and at the table of CHRIST, mingling hearts and affections, in the exerciſes of piety and devotion. The proofs of their ſincere regard to him were ſo ſtrong, and ſo multiplied, as to preclude all doubt of it. And he ſometimes entertains the pleaſing hope, that he may have been the feeble unworthy inſtrument of good to their ſouls, in helping them forward to the heavenly world.

IF the names of thoſe who have died, from among us, within the term often mentioned above, ſhould be called over, moſt of us ſhould hear ſome which deſignated our neareſt and deareſt connexions. Tender parents; beloved partners in life; dear children; affectionate brethren and ſiſters. Calling them to mind may afford a melancholly kind of pleaſure. A care to be followers of them, ſo far as they were of CHRIST, excited and ſtrengthened, will be eſſentially beneficial to us. We cannot ſee them again, in the fleſh, "till the heavens be no more." How happy if we may then meet them, at the right hand of CHRIST, to unite, in tracing the myſterious ſteps of Divine providence; and in celebrating the wonders of redeeming love! Soon our bodies, like their's, will be laid in the grave, and be mouldering in the duſt. A ſucceſſor to your preſent paſtor, may perhaps, half a century hence, make remarks on our deaths, memory, and character, as we do now, on thoſe of our friends, who are gone before us. It is earneſtly to be wiſhed, that theſe commemorative anecdotes, may not only afford tranſient amuſement, but uſeful inſtruction, reſpecting the paſſing nature of time; the ſhortneſs of human life; and the importance of improving well every day as it paſſes.

THIS particular ſociety in which we dwell, is not excluſively the ſchool, in which we may receive inſtruction of this ſerious and univerſally intereſting kind. In neighbouring churches and ſocieties, particularly in

thoſe

thoſe which originated from this,* providence teaches the ſame things, by ſimilar changes and events. " He

D

that

* At the beginning of the term which this diſcourſe reviews, rev. Jonathan Townſend was paſtor of the church in Medfield. He was diſmiſſed from his office, October 9th 1769. Rev. Thomas Prentiſs was inducted into the paſtoral office in that town, October 31ſt 1770; and continues to miniſter to that people in holy things. A ſmall baptiſt ſociety has, for a number of years, exiſted in that town. The late rev. Thomas Gair, was for ſeveral years the paſtor. Since his removal, a Mr. Clarke reſides there, and frequently preaches to them.

In Wrentham, rev. Joſeph Bean was miniſter. On the 12th of December 1784, his life, and his very faithful labours were terminated, in the 66th year of his age, and 34th of his miniſtry. Rev. David Avery was inſtalled his ſucceſſor, May 25, 1786, and his diſmiſſion voted by the town, agreeably to advice of council, April 21. 1794. It is painful to add, that that church and town, which for more than a century enjoyed great peace, harmony, and proſperity, are now in a very unhappy, divided, broken ſtate. May they be led to know and purſue the things which are promotive of peace, and chriſtian edification! A ſmall baptiſt ſociety is in the weſterly part of that town. A rev. Mr. Williams is their miniſter.

The 2d pariſh in Wrentham continued vacant, after the death of rev. Elias Haven, till June 4th 1760, when the rev. Caleb Barnum was ordained their paſtor. He obtained a diſmiſſion from the paſtoral office after about 9 years ſervice among them, and was, ſoon after, inſtalled paſtor of the church in Taunton. He went chaplain into the weſtern army, in 1776, and died abroad. The rev. Nathaniel Emmons was ordained his ſucceſſor, in Wrentham, April 21. 1773, and continues the beloved paſtor of that flock. This 2d pariſh in Wrentham was, in the year 1778, made a town, by an act of incorporation, and the name *Franklin* given to it.

In Needham, the rev. Mr. Townſend continued his faithful labours till September 30th 1762, when his Lord called him away by death, in the 65th year of his age, and 43d of his miniſtry. Rev. Samuel Weſt was ordained his ſucceſſor, April 25th. 1764. He left Needham in November 1788; and was ſoon inſtalled paſtor of a church in Boſton, where he now officiates. The rev. Stephen Palmer was ordained to the paſtoral office, in Needham, November 7. 1792, and there continues his miniſtrations. A number of the inhabitants of Needham got incorporated into a diſtinct precinct, about the year 1773. They were led to ſeek this, on account of ſome diſagreement in the town, reſpecting the place of building a meeting houſe. This 2d precinct has not yet ſettled a miniſter.

In

that is wise will observe these things." And if we extend our view to a larger circle, to mark the footsteps of divine providence, in the vicissitudes which have taken place, within no very long period of past time, more useful information will arise to our minds. Within the easy recollection of many of us, the grand American revolution hath been brought about, which has given our country a station among the sovereign and independent nations of the earth. This forms an important æra, and hath given, or confirmed to us, civil and religious privileges, equal, perhaps superior, to those enjoyed in any part of the world; especially taken in connexion with those wise constitutions of government, which have been formed, in our country, and carried into operation, during, and since the revolution. The faithful page of history, it is hoped, will convey the knowledge of these great events to the latest generations.

Do not the private events which relate more immediately to this society bear evident signatures of a kind providence, rendering it's condition prosperous? "Instead of the fathers are the children." Many repsectable

In Walpole, their first minister, rev. Phillips Payson, died January 22d 1778, in the 74th year of his age, and 50th of his ministry. The rev. George Morey, his successor, was ordained Nov. 19th 1783, and continues the guide and overseer of that people.

In the second parish in Dedham, the rev. Thomas Balch continued his acceptable labours till January 8th 1774, when he was removed by death, in the 63d year of his age, and 38th of his ministry, and was succeeded in office, by rev. Jabez Chickering, the present pastor, who was ordained July 3d 1776.

In the 3d parish in Dedham, of which the rev. Andrew Tyler was pastor, some unhappy dissentions took place, about the year 1764. Attempts to restore peace and harmony not succeeding, Mr. Tyler was dismissed from office, about the close of the year 1772. He died in Boston in 1775. The rev. Thomas Thacher was ordained his successor, June 7th 1780.

The 4th parish in Dedham had the rev. Benjamin Caryl set over them in the Lord, as their first pastor, Nov. 10th 1762. He still labours among them in word and doctrine. That parish was incorporated, as a *district*, by the general court, July 7th 1784, and had the name *Dover* given to it.

able persons have finished their course. Many respectable ones have risen up in their stead. The number of births hath been more than double the number of deaths.

The education of youth has had some share of attention paid to it; and a conviction of it's importance appears to be increasing. * Fourteen young men, † within the period we are retrospecting, received an education at the university in Cambridge. All of them, except one, are now living. Twelve of them entered into one or other of the three learned professions.

Many improvements have been made in the society, tending to convenience and ornament. This decent house ‡ for public worship hath been erected. More than

* A gentleman of respectable learning and abilities, Ebenezer Wight, Esq; hath opened an academy, in the parish, and hath devoted his time to the instruction of youths, of both sexes, in various branches of science. The institution, though new, and of a private kind, bids fair to be useful.

† Their names, time of being graduated, and profession, are in the following table.

Names.	Graduat.	Profes.	Names.	Graduat.	Profes.
George Damân	1756	Divinity	Ebenezer Battelle	1775	Trade
Nathaniel Ames	1761	Physick	Ebenezer Wight	1776	Divinity
Nathaniel Fisher	1763	Divinity	Peter Woodward	1776	Civil Line
* Seth Ames	1764	Physick	Sam. Shuttlesworth	1777	Divinity
Ebenezer Starr	1768	Physick	Samuel Dexter	1781	Law
Joseph Avery	1771	Divinity	Samuel Haven	1789	Law
Fisher Ames	1774	Law	Jonathan Fisher	1792	Divinity

‡ The first meeting-house, tradition says, was built 1638, where the present house stands. The people assembled in it for religious worship about 34 years. In the year 1672 they took it down, and erected another, in the same place, the first being too small to accommodate them. The second, which many of you remember, stood 90 years. In the year 1762 it was taken down, and this, in which we now assemble, was erected, in the same place. The spot fixed upon, by the proprietors, for the first, seems, by general consent, to have been deemed the most suitable, ever since. Soon after the present meeting-house was finished, the handsome clock now in it, was given to the parish, by Samuel Dexter, Esq; In the year 1775, Mr. Joshua Bracket, late of Boston, deceased, gave to the society, the christening

than half the dwelling houſes in the pariſh have been built, and moſt of the others repaired and enlarged. Few (I think but ſeven) have been conſumed by fire.* Some branches of manufactures have been introduced. Others have been extended and enlarged. There hath been an augmentation of property, in the church, and ſociety. The cultivation of the ſoil hath been carried to greater perfection. The number and commodiouſneſs of buildings have been increaſed. A church fund† hath been eſtabliſhed, and become conſiderable. This ſociety is become the ſeat of the public buſineſs of a new formed county.‡ Hereby it's figure and reſpectability are advanced.

And to it's honour, it may be mentioned, that a ſpirit of candor and accommodation hath generally marked it's proceedings, to the maintaining peace and harmony. This was the caſe in building this houſe for public

chriſtening baſon, now in uſe, and the frame in which it ſtands. The aged and venerable Madam Catharina Barnard (formerly Dexter) March 16, 1789, preſented to the ſociety a large folio Bible, deſiring a portion of it might be read, in public, on Lord's days. Her donation was gratefully received, and her deſire complied with.

* The houſes burned belonged to the following perſons, viz. Dr. John Sprague, Robert Smith and his ſon, Joſeph Wight and his ſon, John Eaton, Iſrael Everett jun. Job Richards, and Iſaac Eaton.

† The hiſtory of the origin and progreſs of the church's property, is to be found, partly in the records of the church, and partly in thoſe of the original proprietors of thoſe lands which conſtituted what was, at firſt, the town of Dedham. It is well underſtood that the fund, which the church now poſſeſſes, proceeded from the ſale of a number of lots of land, which belonged to it. This ſale was made more than 30 years ago. The money produced by it was let out upon intereſt. The intereſt, for a ſucceſſion of years, was added to the principal. The annual intereſt now amounts to about 267 dollars, or 80 pounds. It is applied towards the ſupport of the miniſter. It renders the burden of maintaining public worſhip light.

‡ The county of Norfolk was formed out of the county of Suffolk, by an act of the general court, paſſed March 26th 1793. Dedham was made the ſhire-town. The public county buildings were not compleated, till a year or two after the incorporating act was paſſed.

publie worſhip; and in ſettling the ſeats, apartments and conveniences to be enjoyed in it. This was the caſe when a change of the verſion of the pſalms,* to be uſed in public worſhip, was repeatedly made. And this hath been the caſe in regulating that agreeable part of religious ſervice, ſinging the praiſes of GOD in his houſe.† And, this alſo hath been the caſe when alterations were, more than once, propoſed, and agreed to, as to terms and modes,‡ of admitting perſons to church fellowſhip, and chriſtian privileges. Few diſputes and controverſies have prevailed in the church or ſociety. If the members have not always been "perfectly joined together in the ſame mind, and in the ſame judgment," yet,

* ABOUT 35 years ago the ſociety, with very little oppoſition, exchanged, what was generally called, the *New-England* pſalms, for the verſion of Tate and Brady, and a collection of Dr. Watts's hymns bound with it. About three years ago, without any oppoſition, they introduced Dr. Watts's verſion of the pſalms, and his hymns, in the room of Tate and Brady's.

† Much commendation and thanks are due to thoſe who lead in that part of worſhip, for the judicious and pleaſing manner in which the ſervice is performed.

‡ March 7th 1742, the church voted not to inſiſt on perſons offering relations, as a term of admiſſion into fellowſhip with them; and at the ſame time introduced a confeſſion of faith, to be publickly aſſented to, by each perſon, when admitted, who did not offer a relation. This confeſſion of faith, though excellent in general, was long, and contained ſome religious tenets, concerning which many pious perſons have their doubts and difficulties. About the year 1767, it was ſuggeſted to the church, that ſomething more conciſe, and expreſſed in more general terms, might better anſwer the purpoſe. A ſubſtitute of that kind was propoſed, and peaceably adopted.

At a meeting of the church, April 11th 1793, it was ſuggeſted, whether it might not be adviſeable to make ſome alterations in the modes and forms of admitting perſons into communion. A committee was choſen to conſider the matter and report, what they think proper to be done. The committee, at an adjournment of the meeting, reported a general form of chriſtian union, and covenant engagements, in which all perſons admitted are to agree. This was adopted without oppoſition. The ſaid committee alſo reported the following method of admitting perſons, as, in their opinion, proper and adviſeable, viz.

"That

yet a diſpoſition has prevailed, to permit every one freely to enjoy the right of his private opinion, provided he doth not break in upon the rights of others. This ſpirit of candor and mutual forbearance has happily tended to the peace of the community. GOD grant it may abound among us, more and more.

BUT whether the ſcenes through which we paſs, or the events upon which we are remarking, be pleaſing or painful; one thing is certain: we ſhall be here but a little while, to obſerve them. The faſhion of the world changes, and paſſes away, and we are changing, and paſſing away with it.

YOUR paſtor need not tell you that he is in the decline of life. Evidences of it cannot eſcape his and your obſervation. He deſires to adore that kind providence, which has ſuſtained him ſo long. And he takes this opportunity to expreſs ſentiments of gratitude to his beloved people, for the candor and friendſhip with which they have generally treated him. He wiſhes never to forget the many, many expreſſions of their kindneſs and affection. Unkindneſſes, and injuries he deſires to remember none. He wiſhes to be inſtrumental of promoting their beſt intereſt, during the ſhort remaining period, GOD may continue him in the miniſtry. He earneſtly requeſts their prayers that he may be ſo. He has no ground to calculate upon a long continuance. He can expect no other, than e'er long to be laid by, as a broken, or worn out veſſel. But while any conſiderable

" That a perſon, deſiring admiſſion, ſhall apply to the miniſter, and " make his deſire known; that the miniſter ſhall mention this, " in public; and if no valid objection is offered againſt the " perſon, within a fortnight, the name of the perſon ſhall be " inſerted in the church covenant, before-mentioned. And " when the miniſter hath notified the church, that this has " been done, ſuch perſon ſhall be conſidered as a member " of the church, and be treated as ſuch." This report was accepted by the church, the following clauſe being added, viz. " Provided however, that if any perſons ſhall chuſe rather to be " admitted into the church, in either of the methods which " have been heretofore uſed, they ſhall readily be allowed their " choice."

able degree of bodily ſtrength, and powers of mind, is continued to him, he hopes not to be a mere cumberer of the ground, or burden to ſociety. To ſurvive all capacity of uſefulneſs, appears to him an event, by no means to be deſired.

THOUGH he ſincerely wiſhes that his private intercourſe among his people may be agreeable to them, and miniſter to their profit; yet probably his occaſional viſits may not, in frequency, come up to their expectations, or his own inclination. Should this be the caſe, their candor, and good ſenſe will furniſh ſufficient apologies. They will do him the juſtice to acknowledge, that he hath not been a ſtranger, in their families, in times of ſickneſs and trouble. As he hath taken a tender and ſympathetick part, in their afflictions, it is his deſire to do ſo ſtill, to the extent of his ſtrength and abilities.

HE feels great ſolicitude for the utility and ſucceſs of his publick labours and inſtructions. The ſmall capacity he has, as a publick religious teacher, he deſires diligently and faithfully to improve. Still it lies very much with his hearers to determine, whether theſe endeavours ſhall be beneficial to them or not. Without a ſtated, ſerious, and prayerful attention, on their part, what profit can they expect to receive? He earneſtly intreats them not refuſe ſuch an attention.

THE remarks which have been made, at this time, he hopes will be received with the ſame candor and friendſhip, with which they have been prepared, and delivered. For a publick ſpeaker to ſay ſo much concerning himſelf, may be deemed rather indelicate. The ſubject and the occaſion are his apology. He hath not been wont to treſpaſs in this way. And this probably may be the laſt time, that any thing of this ſort, will be delivered by him, in this place. Poſſibly ſome of the hiſtorical anecdotes, in the foregoing pages, may be thought too ſmall and trifling to have a place there. It was the deſire of the writer not to offend in this way. Little incidents generally intereſt the feelings of perſons immediately concerned in them.

To conclude,

THE paſtor of this flock conſiders his time, all his little ſtrength, whether of body or mind, and even his life, devoted to the honour of CHRIST, and the promotion of their ſpiritual good; and thinks he can ſincerely adopt the language of the apoſtle, and ſay, that he "doth not account his life dear to him," if it may be thus faithfully, and uſefully ſpent; and "his courſe, and miniſtry finiſhed with joy."

THE law of mortality, if nothing elſe, muſt e'er long diſſolve the relation of paſtor and flock, which has now ſubſiſted between him and them, through the term of forty years. GOD grant that he and they may ſo diſcharge the reſpective duties of the relation, as ſhall promote the joy and felicity of both, in the coming world.

A M E N.